

Prologue

For twenty-five years Roger believed his birth date to be 30 October 1965.

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But he had come into the world in a hurry and backwards. The town hall clock chimed midnight as he took his first breath. It was a warm June night, mid-way through the decade that came to be known as the Swinging Sixties.

It was a decade where Elvis with his hips was King, but Britain's Rolling Stones hit song, *Little Red Rooster* was banned for American release. It was deemed too sexually explicit.

It was a decade that saw America lose its 35th President, the first elected Roman Catholic, to an assassin's bullet. The preceding year, one Norma Jean Baker who had husked *Happy Birthday, Mr President* at the White House was found dead and naked in her bungalow bed.

It was a decade where the 'Shrimp' created shock horror headlines when she appeared on Melbourne's hallowed racing turf in a dress five inches above the knee, sans hat, gloves, and stockings.

It was a decade when a white sniper shattered the dreams of a black Nobel Peace Prize winning Baptist minister.

It was a decade that saw civil rights, anti-Vietnam protests, women's rights, gay rights and environmental movements.

It was a decade where the son of a QC and a countess was more acceptable than a divorcee as a husband for the Queen's sister.

It was the decade of the Cuba Crisis. It was also a time when the young flocked to Woodstock, and idolised Dylan, Hendrix, Joplin, psychedelic rock, and LSD. During this decade, man walked on the moon.

In 1965, the year of his birth, the musical, *The Sound of Music* won the Academy Award's Best Picture. A year before, Julie Andrews won the Oscar for Best Actress in *Mary Poppins*. The Oscar for best film was won by *My Fair Lady*.

The 60s were years that swung with hypocrisy and contradiction.

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At the time of Roger's birth, Roger's maternal grandmother paced the waiting room in the maternity section of Craigmount Nursing Home at St Andrews, Scotland. A nurse bought her a cup of tea, complemented by two biscuits on a separate saucer.

Roger's father was thousands of miles away, stationed in Bien Hoa, Vietnam. He was one of the 1500 soldiers that comprised the first Australian battalion. The Australians were stationed with the US 173rd Airborne Brigade.

In Australia, Roger's maternal grandfather was preparing himself for the Supreme Court in Melbourne. He was to deliver his sentence upon one Victor Hummingbird, accused rapist, and murderer. The courtroom was full.

His paternal grandfather was also busy in Australia, as he was involved in the preparation and training of Australian Troops for Vietnam.

His paternal grandmother was dead.

The official time and date of Roger's birth was recorded as 11:59 p.m. on Wednesday, 30 July 1965. The certificate was filed away, in a grey steel filing cabinet on the second floor in the Registrar's Office for Births, Deaths and Marriages in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Chapter One

Monday 5 July 1999

Cate Summerville was killing time with a second cappuccino. There was no one to go home to. The previous night, she had arrived home from work to find Gianni and all his possessions gone. Cate had been unable to find out his whereabouts.

Today was her day off. She had spent it at Melbourne's Crown Casino with her friend, Nikki, who had insisted, "Come on, it'll cheer you up." But Nikki had a husband and family to go home to. So, Nikki had left around three o'clock. Cate refused Nikki's offer of a lift home, and thus, Cate was now on her own. Cate's two children were currently on vacation with their father in Queensland for the mid-year school break. She had contemplated whether to take in a movie, but that would involve a late night train ride which did not appeal to her. Nor did she have enough money for a taxi. Cate did not wish to go home just yet. Instead, she spent her time wandering haphazardly, window shopping through the arcades of the Casino: Gucci, Tiffany's and the seafood and char-grill restaurants. All were beyond Cate's limited finances.

Cate sought relief from the hot atmosphere of the Casino. She went outside through the nearest exit. She aimlessly crossed Queensbridge Street, and then walked along the Promenade that ran parallel with the Yarra River, heading towards the Southbank tourist area. She paused at one of the chalk drawings on the footpath. It depicted Pegasus flying across the Melbourne skyline. Weather had faded the image, but it was still discernable, and Cate pondered for some moments upon its message. *A horse with wings? In the city? Sheesh...weird!*

Cate stopped for coffee at one of the many eatery outlets of Southbank. Although it was a cool winter's afternoon, she chose to sit outside the main eatery, under the shelter of the veranda. She leaned back against a thick, transparent plastic windbreak, and watched the passing crowds. She welcomed the crispness of the air after the stuffiness and smoke of the Casino. An overhead gas heater took the edge off any surrounding chill. She watched the swelling throng of people intent upon heading home. She guessed the time to be close to 4.30 p.m.

The masses had a purpose to leave the city; a purpose that she lacked. Cate constructed little paths in the cappuccino's froth, and played with the black plastic spoon. At intervals, she turned the spoon over, and slowly licked it clean.

Cate stopped in mid lick. One person caught her attention as he strode past the Visitors' Information booth, then momentarily disappeared behind a large planter box that contained a neatly crew-cut trimmed hedge. When the figure reappeared, Cate jumped up quickly, rocked the table, and spilt her coffee. *Darn!*

"Roger? ... umm, Roger?" as she ran after the figure. *What the hell was his surname?* Then she remembered it, but before she could say it, he had stopped abruptly, and turned. "It's me! Cate, Cate Summerville...."

He had not been called Roger for years. He knew that voice. Knew it and remembered it immediately, but feigned otherwise. "Cate?"

"Don't you remember me? Back in... Umm, God it must be ... fifteen years! It is you, isn't it?"

Roger noted the mini, the cleavage and the ginger hair, in that order, and made the decision to reply in the affirmative. "Cate! Good heavens!"

Cate was relieved that she had been correct. She scanned the immaculately groomed figure that stood before her. Cate babbled, "How've you been? What've you been doing with yourself? Got time for a coffee?"

"Sure ... why not?" and he casually followed her back to the table. Roger put his briefcase down, and helped Cate with her chair, then noticed the spilt coffee and said, "I'll get my coffee, and you - a refill."

She gazed intently upon the back view of the retreating form until he disappeared inside the Southbank complex. When he returned and before he had settled himself at the table, she restarted her prattle. "God, Roger ... when was it? '82? ... '83?"

"1984."

Good, he hasn't forgotten. A surge of pleasure ran through her. They sat and talked for more than an hour. Cate reminisced about the time that they had known each other when they had shared a house in Carlton with Mike and Steve. "I married him, you know."

"Married who?"

"Mike Baldrich, of course. Remember him?"

Roger knew, all right. *Bloody faggot!* But he calmly answered, "Yes, of course. And Steve?"

"Dunno. He was Mike's best man, but since our divorce, I've lost touch."

Roger let Cate ramble on. By doing so, he learnt that she and Mike had been divorced for about five years, and that Mike had since moved out of Melbourne to Sunbury, and had recently become engaged. By now, all the promenade lights were on. The city's skyline twinkled in a pastiche reflection on the Yarra River's surface. The second wave of homeward bound travelers had peaked and dissipated as quickly as they had appeared. Even the begging seagulls and sparrows had left for the night. A waiter bustled around, collected the used crockery from empty tables, and returned wayward chairs to their correct positions. Patrons obviously bound for the adjacent Arts Theatre complex stopped at Southgate for a quick pre-show meal at the Eatery. Diners not bound for the theatre slowly began to fill Southgate's yuppie restaurants.

Cate and Roger were amongst only a handful that chose to remain outside. She unbuttoned her jacket, then folded her arms under her breasts, and leaned forward on the table in such a manner that fittingly showed off her ample cleavage to his appreciative eyes as she said, "He's trying to get custody of Fiona, you know, but Adam wants to stay with me."

"Why? Trying to get custody I mean?" he asked. *Bet I know why!*

"The moralistic shit doesn't think me working nights is proper. Doesn't like working mothers. Thinks they should be at home. It's not as though I get that much maintenance from him. Him and his little miss goodie two shoes."

The venom in Cate's voice surprised him. None of her chatter was of any interest to him. He let Cate spit on whilst his thoughts were elsewhere. Last Wednesday had been his birthday. There had been no present, no card, not even a telephone call. It had been the same last year, the year before, and the year before that. Cate paused to drain the last dregs in her cup. This hiatus brought Roger back to the present. His eyes re-evaluated her in detail; *skin still remarkably good ...nails, ginger-red, must be false...hazel-green eyes... magnificent ginger ponytail ... hip clinging black mini ... cream v-neck sweater, nice cleavage. Revolting scarf!*

"I must get your address," he said, as he picked up and placed his briefcase on the table between them. From amongst its contents of papers, files, the tools of his trade, travelers cheques and passports, he retrieved a notepad and Schaefer pen, and handed them to her. As she wrote with her head down, Roger discreetly slipped a small vial from his briefcase into his coat pocket. "While you do that, I'll get us another cup of coffee." Before Cate could answer yes or no, he was gone.

Cate wrote her maiden name, address and telephone number, and waited. As he re-joined her with the coffees, she silently studied the figure seated opposite. *Eyes are still icy and blue; not a strand of grey hair in sight. Dyed to keep it dark brown? You've still got that elegant, almost beautiful face. Still slim and lanky. Six four, or something like that ... and fit... I wonder if you work weights?* He leaned forward on the edge of the chair, and retrieved the note pad and pen.

"I'm in business. A consultant," he replied to an earlier question. "I have an office here in Southgate." He watched Cate raise her eyebrows. Yes, *that's exactly what you wanted to hear.*

Wow! Not bad at all! "You're obviously doing very well for yourself." Cate responded.

"Yes, I am. And you, Cate? What are you up to, now?"

"I'm a manager at Sadi's. It's a restaurant." He had not heard of it.

"Are you waiting for anyone?" he asked deliberately, "at the moment, I mean?"

"No."

Good!

"And you?" she replied as she ran her tongue slowly around the frothy, inverted spoon.

Same old Cate! You haven't changed a bit. Ten minutes should do it.

"Hungry?" he asked. "Feel like take-away... Chinese, whatever? Back at my place, if you like? Over a bottle of wine?" Cate readily accepted. *I knew you would.*

With the coffees finished, she automatically slung the shoestring strap of her handbag over her head so that it hung diagonally across her body. They left their sheltered spot, descended the few steps to Promenade Walk, and headed east towards Prince's Bridge. Cold fingers of air slapped around their faces. Despite this, Cate left her jacket open. Roger smiled.

River cruise boats were securely tied up for the night, and the Information Booth was now closed. Ominous black clouds were in sync with the season. Late theatre patrons briskly walked along the Promenade toward the Arts complex. They hustled past, and dodged the ambling figure and his companion. Roger listened to Cate's incessant chatter. She tripped on a non-existent crack in the footpath, and took his arm to steady herself. *I feel...how?*

They reached the dimly lit area that ran under the heavily buttressed labyrinths of the Art's Complex just before the bridge. Stragglers dispersed up the steps to the left, which led up and over the bridge to Flinders Street Railway station and to the trams in Swanston Street. Others disappeared up the ramp to the right to see concerts and live theatre. The two figures however, continued on slowly under the bridge, leaving humanity behind. A tram rumbled its way over their heads, sounding like thunder. Cate was led out into the darkness of the night, past the rowing boat sheds, also now firmly closed and deserted. What lighting existed cast only the feeblest of shadows.

Hurried footsteps echoed ahead. Roger deliberately stopped, turned his back to the approaching couple, and pulled Cate towards him, as if in an embrace. Cate swooned, and said, "Oh Roger!" as the couple scurried past. He continued the embrace until the couple had disappeared from view. Then he propelled Cate along the path. Yes, *we're alone!*

"Is it much farther?" she slurred, legs buckling, "'cause I'm feeling a teensy, weensy bit funny."

Roger's right arm encircled and supported the increasingly disoriented Cate. The noise from the traffic was now only a low rumble behind them. He took her past the line of boat sheds, and along the deserted road that ran between the river and the parkland. A bushy garden lay to their right. His senses were fully adjusted to the darkness. The adjacent park was deserted. Cate was easily led into the bushes. Leaves from the Liquid Ambers had created a bed-like carpet in the area behind the dense shrubbery of Camellia trees. The tall ground cover filtered out the distant street lighting. They were now invisible to any potential passers by. *Perfect!*

He turned Cate to face him. He slipped his left arm around her, whilst his right hand traveled up and caressed her cheek. Arousal spread through her as she slipped her arms under his now open coat, and closed her eyes in anticipation. There was no warning. His right hand covered her mouth and pinched her nostrils shut between his thumb and first finger. She gasped for air, but his left arm held her firm. Her face was imprisoned in the thick leather glove.

"Ummmmm!" Her voice was inaudible as she tried to struggle to free herself. But her arms were trapped under the thick coat, so she produced little resistance. As her legs began to buckle, he carried her weight. Cate slipped into unconsciousness.